

BACKGROUND: RELIGIOUS HATRED IN INDIA & GLOBAL SECURITY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's anti-Muslim party founded by Nazi sympathizers

The crisis in Kashmir created by Narendra Modi has its origins in a movement that advances a racist ideology and advocates ethno-nationalist violence. The international community is not likely to respond with sufficient energy and resolve unless political leaders aided by the media appreciate that Modi's decision to assert control of Kashmir is deeply embedded in a set of beliefs and practices that played an important role in his rise to power and continues to be central to his successful political strategy.

- Modi's political power in India is derived from a movement that has for decades advanced racist ideology and ethnonationalist violence. Since childhood, Modi has been closely and actively associated with the RSS, an organization birthed by Nazi sympathizers that explicitly endorses the strategy and tactics of Hitler and Mussolini. RSS is the movement that spawned Ghandi's assassin, Nathuram Godse.
- Modi earned the title of "Butcher of Gujarat" as Chief Minister of that state where he watched over an anti-Muslim pogrom that killed over 1,000 people in 2002. The Bush administration's State Department then barred him from entering the U.S. for "severe violations of religious freedom."
- Modi continues to countenance government-sanctioned violence against Muslims
- Modi's government is now building detention camps for 2 million Muslims in Assam, many of whom have lived there for generations but who cannot produced documents proving their Indian citizenship.
- With Kashmir, Modi's India now poses an imminent, credible threat to regional and global security.
 - The crisis Modi has created in Kashmir, as with the less-noted crisis in Assam, is particularly dangerous because of its high stakes for him ideologically and electorally.
- The international community has been hesitant to describe the Prime Minister or his ruling party in such stark terms.
 - For journalists, using epithets like "fascist" is often frowned upon as editorializing: subjective, inflammatory and fraught.
 - Foreign service professionals are reasonably concerned about misapprehending a government with which they require a working relationship.
- But the situation has developed such that, beyond any humanitarian imperative, to avoid this language is now to critically disservice national and public interests.

- As [the Associated Press acknowledged this year](#), choosing not to identify racist speech or action as “racist,” even when doing so might be provocative, is a barrier to the accurate production and dissemination of knowledge.
- For governments, the situation is all the more serious: Modi’s actions in Kashmir constitute an international emergency, threatening the safety and stability of the region and the world.
- To contextualize the crisis in Kashmir, and elucidate the cause for international alarm, this backgrounder provides (i) a history of Modi’s political party and affiliates; (ii) a history of Modi’s own political career; (iii) an overview of theories of fascism, compared against the present moment; and (iv) an assessment of India’s historical and contemporary role in the politics and security of South Asia.

HISTORY IN CONTEXT I: THE BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY (BJP) & RASHTRIYA SWAYAMSEVAK SANGH (RSS)

- The ruling party of India, Modi’s BJP, was formally established in 1980, but its roots are in a Hindu ethnonationalist tradition that extends back much further.
- The BJP was founded by the RSS, a paramilitary organization dedicated to cleansing India of non-Hindu minority communities and cultures.
- The RSS formed almost 100 years ago to advance the doctrine of “Hindutva,” which holds that the glory of a unified Hindu racial identity is India’s destiny.
 - Veer Savarkar, the father of Hindutva, urged a “defense of [Hindu] race and land.”
 - Hindutva’s popular appeal originally stemmed from opposition to British colonial rule, but the RSS was ultimately more interested in Hindu nationalism than decolonization.
 - The RSS sided with the British colonists over the secular democratic groups seeking India’s independence, who they criticized as “Muslim sympathizers.”
- The pioneers of RSS came to idolize Adolf Hitler’s agenda and methods, with Savarkar arguing in 1940 that “Nazism proved undeniably the savior of Germany.”
- One leader of the RSS, M. S. Golwalkar, wrote that Nazi Germany’s approach to Jews was “race pride at its highest.”
- Increasingly, the RSS began to re-appropriate Nazi iconography to suit their own pursuit of a pure Aryan race.
 - The concept of a supreme Aryan race actually traces back to racist interpretations of the Sanskrit epics, which Modi and the BJP selectively invoke to justify their agenda.

- The RSS has organized anti-Muslim terrorism for decades; they were outlawed three times in modern Indian history, but now assume complete power over government and society.
- To this day, RSS members [dress in brownshirt uniforms and train for violence](#), explicitly claiming the mantle of the paramilitary groups who supported Hitler and Mussolini.
- The RSS is the base of Modi's power, and its Hindutva advocacy has pushed forward Modi's agendas in Assam and Kashmir.

HISTORY IN CONTEXT II: MODI'S LIFE & POLITICAL CAREER

- Modi began training with the RSS when he was only 8 years old.
- He started working for the RSS full-time in the 1970s, and their ethnonationalist ideology shaped his political style and ambitions.
- In 2001, he rose to power as the Chief Minister of Gujarat, where he watched over the Gujarat massacre, an anti-Muslim pogrom killing over 1,000 people.
- For overseeing the pogroms and exonerating his friends who initiated them, he became known as the "butcher of Gujarat," and the Bush administration's State Department barred him from entering the U.S. for "severe violations of religious freedom."
- As Chief Minister, Modi also changed local schools' curriculums to glorify Hitler and the Nazis — the history textbooks his State Board published included chapters like "Hitler, the Supremo," and "Internal Achievements of Nazism."
- One section of a Modi-approved textbook reads: "Hitler lent dignity and prestige to the German government. He adopted the policy of opposition towards the Jewish people and advocated the supremacy of the German race."
- As Prime Minister of India, Modi has adapted Hitler's foreign policy of *lebensraum* to guide India's conquest and cleansing of previously autonomous territory, like Kashmir.
- If history is a lesson, Modi's ambitions for racial purity and territorial domination are just beginning, threatening the security of South Asia and the world.

IS MODI'S INDIA A FASCIST GOVERNMENT?

Determining whether Modi's India can be accurately described as "fascist" requires us to establish what fascism is and how it works in practice, with a basis in academic consensus.

- Fascists attain power by rallying ethnic majorities against a demonized minority "other."
 - Modi's Hindu nationalist agenda violently pits a Hindu religious majority against a Muslim minority — roughly 14.2% of India's total population.
 - This agenda packages religious differences as a fateful clash of race and culture.

- Fascists construct a vast, mythic identity around the majority, giving rulers a near-divine legitimacy in pursuing ethnonationalist purification.
 - Hindutva, the defining concept behind his sweeping political appeal, posits that the glory of a unified Hindu racial identity is the destiny of the Indian state.
 - Modi reinforces this mythic identity by invoking centuries-old, foundational Sanskrit narratives — especially the epic *Ramayana* — and framing his political rule as their divine legacy.
 - This legacy, and India’s destiny, thus requires an “urgent defense of our race and land,” as the pioneer of Hindutva first argued almost 100 years ago.
- Fascist groups seek to redefine national identity in the image of this mythic majority identity, pushing out a constructed internal enemy.
 - The 1948 assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, an icon of Indian identity, was carried out by RSS member Nathuram Godse, now a key influence on Modi’s political allies.
 - Modi’s RSS aims to erase the historical status of Gandhi and his protégé Nehru, the first Prime Minister, viewing them as “Muslim sympathizers.”
 - Modi’s BJP, which represents the RSS, won a sweeping majority in the 2019 election on a campaign referencing Muslims as “infiltrators” and “termites.”
 - One victorious member of Modi’s BJP, Sadhvi Pragya, was convicted of terrorism a decade earlier, when she conspired to bomb a Muslim-majority city, killing 10 people. Now, she is a powerful member of Indian parliament. At her victory party, she celebrated Gandhi’s assassin as a patriot.
- As fascists consolidate identity and power, they advance political and military action to “cleanse” that identity of enemy presence.
 - Modi has now stripped citizenship from 1.9 million people in Assam, mostly Muslims, falsely claiming that they are illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.
 - India is now building detention camps for these stateless Muslim Indians.
- Then, fascists expand outward, using that ethnonationalist energy to conquer and annex new territory.
 - Modi has now unilaterally revoked the political autonomy of Muslim-majority Kashmir, imposing order through brutal violence.
 - India’s ambitions in Kashmir, which borders Pakistan, risk potentially devastating conflict between two nuclear-armed nations.

IN BRIEF: INDIA, KASHMIR & SOUTH ASIAN SECURITY

- India's 1947 independence involved partitioning it from another new and separate Muslim state, Pakistan.
- After two subsequent wars between India and Pakistan, both started to develop nuclear programs in the late 60s and early 70s.
- Over the course of these mid-century decades, the disputed territory of Kashmir — for which the UN originally recommended a plebiscite vote of self-determination — joined the nation of India on condition of political autonomy.
- Modi has now unilaterally revoked Kashmir's political autonomy, kidnapped its leadership, cut off its internet access and rounded up more than 2,000 Kashmiris in unknown locations; this has reignited already grave tensions between India and Pakistan.
- The possibility of renewed violent conflict over Kashmir, pitting two nuclear-armed nations against each other once more, could destabilize and devastate the South Asian region and the world.
- Modi's moves in Kashmir demand international attention and action.

CONCLUSION

- Modi's India has demonstrated ambitions of ethnic cleansing and conquest.
- These ambitions, which can be reasonably described as fascist, are becoming a new reality.
 - Muslims are regularly murdered, assaulted and stripped of rights.
 - Concentration camps for ethnic minority targets are in construction.
 - India's thirst for outward expansion and domination is revealing itself on the ground.
- If the world looks on in resignation, as we did at Munich in 1938, India's quest for ethnic cleansing and annexation will only grow stronger — this time with the protection of nuclear arms.
- The international community must act to save India's Muslims, to save India's neighbors and to save itself.

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USA Today	Deirdre	Shesgreen	Congressional Reporter	dshesgreen@usatoday.com	1(703) 854-3400
USA Today - Washington Bureau	Maureen	Groppe		mgroppe@usatoday.com	
VOA News Online	Cindy	Spang		cspang@VOANews.COM	
Voice of America Radio Network	Michael	Bowman	Senate Correspondent	mbowman@voa.gov	1(202) 203-4322
Voice of America Radio Network	Cheryl	Parker	Booker, "Plugged in with Greta Van Susteren"	CParker@voanews.com	
Vox	Ella	Nilsen	Politics & Policy Reporter	ella.nilsen@vox.com	1(202) 591-1140
Wall Street Journal - Washington Bureau	Natalie	Andrews	Congress Reporter	natalie.andrews@wsj.com	1(202) 862-9200
Wall Street Journal - Washington Bureau	Michael	Bender	Reporter	mike.bender@wsj.com	1(202) 725-5805
Wall Street Journal - Washington Bureau	Kristina	Peterson	Congressional Reporter	kristina.peterson@wsj.com	1(202) 256-3749
Wall Street Journal - Washington Bureau	Vivian	Salama	White House Reporter	vivian.salama@wsj.com	1(202) 862-9200
Washington Examiner	Naomi	Lim		nlm@washingtontexaminer.com	

Outlet	First	Last	Title	Email	Phone
Associated Press - Houston Bureau	Nomaan	Merchant	Reporter	nmerchant@ap.org	1(281) 872-8900
Austin American-Statesman	Nancy	Flores	Community Affairs, Metro Reporter & Columnist	nflores@statesman.com	1(512) 912-2559
Dallas Morning News	Tristan	Hallman	Metro Reporter	thallman@dallasnews.com	1(214) 977-8222
Dallas Observer	Silas	Allen	News Editor	silas.allen@dallasobserver.com	1(214) 757-9000
Dallas Observer	Jim	Schutze	Columnist	jim.schutze@dallasobserver.com	(214) 757-9000
Dallas Observer	Stephen	Young	Staff Writer & Reporter	stephen.young@dallasobserver.com	1(214) 757-9000
Houston Chronicle	Melissa	Aguilar	Senior Editor	melissa.aguilar@chron.com	1(713) 362-6894
Houston Chronicle	Melissa	Bech	Copy Editor / Blogger	melissa.bech@chron.com	1(713) 362-7684
Houston Chronicle	Keri	Blakinger	Reporter	keri.blakinger@chron.com	1(713) 362-7171
Houston Chronicle	Jennifer	Bolton	Staff Writer	jennifer.bolton@chron.com	1(281) 250-0368
Houston Chronicle	Mike	Glenn	Reporter	mike.glenn@chron.com	1(713) 362-6814
Houston Chronicle	Lisa	Gray	Senior Editor for Digital	lisa.gray@chron.com	(713) 362-7171
Houston Chronicle	Michelle	Iracheta	Reporter	michelle.iracheta@chron.com	1(713) 362-4408
Houston Chronicle	Loni	Kriel	Immigration Reporter	loni.kriel@chron.com	1(713) 362-3568
Houston Chronicle	Mike	Morris	City Hall Reporter	mike.morris@chron.com	1(713) 362-6810
Houston Chronicle	Lise	Olsen	Deputy Investigations Editor and Senior Investigative Reporter	lise.olsen@chron.com	1(713) 362-7462
Houston Chronicle	Mizanur	Rahman	Deputy Metro Editor	mizanur.rahman@chron.com	1(713) 362-6394
Houston Chronicle	Mike	Snyder	Reporter/Columnist	mike.snyder@chron.com	1(713) 362-6327
Houston Chronicle	Jeremy	Wallace	Politics Reporter	jeremy.wallace@chron.com	1(713) 362-7171
KGEN-TV	Kris	Radcliffe	Morning Anchor	kradcliffe@kcentv.com	1(254) 859-5481
KENS-TV	Roxie	Bustamante	Reporter	rbustamante@kens5.com	1(210) 366-5000
KERA-FM	Christopher	Connelly	Reporter	cconnely@kera.org	1(214) 740-9328
KEYE-TV	Scott	Thuman	Chief Political Correspondent	swthuman@sbgvtv.com	1(703) 236-9337
KHOU-TV	Marcelino	Benito	Reporter	mbenito@khou.com	(713) 526-1111
KPRC-TV	Phil	Archer	Reporter	parcher@kprc.com	1(713) 778-4933
KSAT-TV	Jessie	Degollado	Reporter	jdegollado@ksat.com	1(210) 351-1269
KTEP-FM	Louie	Saenz	News & Public Affairs Director	lusaenz@utep.edu	1(915) 747-5152
KTRK-TV	Katherine	Marchand	Reporter	katherine.marchand@abc.com	1(713) 666-0713
KTRK-TV	Miya	Shay	Television Reporter	miya.shay@abc.com	1(713) 666-0713
KTRK-TV - 13 Eyewitness News at 4	Ilona	Carson	Anchor	lrice@kut.org	1(713) 666-0713
KUT-FM	Laura	Rice	Senior Producer and Reporter	lrice@kut.org	1(512) 232-5424
KUT-FM	Trey	Shaar	Producer and Reporter	tshaar@kut.org	(512) 471-1631
KWEX-TV	Antonio	Guillen	Journalist	aguillen@univision.net	1(210) 242-7451
KWTX-TV	Tara	Mergener	Anchor	tara.mergener@kwtx.com	1(254) 776-3242
KXAN-TV	Alyssa	Goard	Reporter / Multimedia Journalist	alysa.goard@kxan.com	1(512) 476-3636
KXAN-TV	Phil	Prazan	Reporter	phil@kxan.com	1(512) 703-5300
KXAS-TV	Julie	Fine	Political Reporter	julie.fine@nbcuni.com	1(800) 232-5927
KXXV-TV	Hunter	Davis	Reporter	Hunter.davis@kxxv.com	1(254) 754-2525
New York Times - Houston Bureau	Manny	Fernandez	Bureau Chief	manny@nytimes.com	1(713) 752-2006 x1
Texas Observer	Gus	Bova	Staff Writer	bova@texasobserver.org	1(512) 766-7027
Texas Observer	Justin	Miller	Reporter	millier@texasobserver.org	1(512) 477-0746
Texas Standard - KUT-FM	Jill	Ament	Producer and Reporter	jament@kut.org	1(512) 471-1631
Texas Town and City	Christina	Corrigan	Editor	chris@tml.org	1(512) 231-7400
Texas Tribune	Julian	Aguilar	Reporter	laguilar@texastribune.org	1(214) 718-3332
Texas Tribune	Jay	Root	Investigative Reporter	jroot@texastribune.org	1(512) 716-8643
Texas Tribune	Patrick	Svitek	Political Reporter	psvitek@texastribune.org	(512) 716-8600
USA Today	Rick	Jervis	Correspondent	rjervis@usatoday.com	1(512) 533-2203
Waco Tribune-Herald	J.B.	Smith	Managing Editor	jbsmith@wacotrib.com	(254) 757-5752
WFAA-TV	Matt	Howerton	Reporter	mhowerton@wfaa.com	1(214) 748-9631
WOAI-TV	David	Calabiano	Reporter	dcalabiano@sbgvtv.com	1(210) 226-4444

Outlet	First	Last	Title	Email	Phone
ABC News Network	Elizabeth	McLaughlin		elizabeth.mclaughlin@abc.com	
AFP - AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE - NEW YORK	Philippe	Rater		Philippe.RATER@afp.com	
Al Jazeera	Amanda	Price	Senior Producer, Al Jazeera English	PriceA@aljazeera.net	
Al-Arabiya TV - New York Bureau	Talal	Al-Haj	New York & UN Bureau Chief	alhaij@aol.com	1(212) 355-5845
All Things Considered - NPR/National Public R	Marylouise	Kelly	Host	mikelly@npr.org	
AlterNet	Ben	Norton		Ben.Norton@AlterNet.com	
Anadolu Agency - New York Bureau	Bertul	Yuruk	Correspondent	byuruk@aia.com.tr	1(646) 595-8484
ANSA - New York Bureau	Alessandra	Baldini	US Correspondent	alessandra.baldini@ansa.it	
Associated Press	Brian	Carovillano	Managing Editor	bcrovillano@ap.org	(212) 621-1500
Associated Press - United Nations Bureau	Edith	Lederer	Chief United Nations Correspondent	ederere@ap.org	1(212) 621-7921
Associated Press - Washington Bureau	Deb	Riechmann	Reporter	diechmann@ap.org	1(202) 641-9000
Associated Press - Washington Bureau	Jullie	Pace	Washington Bureau Chief	pace@ap.org	1(202) 641-9809
BBC/British Broadcasting Corporation - New York	Nada	Tawfik	Reporter	nada.tawfik@bbc.co.uk	1(906) 391-2954
Bloomberg News	Ethan	Bronner	Senior Editor, Trump Organization	ebronner@bloomberg.net	1(212) 617-3677
Bloomberg News	David	Wainer	Reporter	dwainer3@bloomberg.net	1(212) 617-2300
Bloomberg News - Washington Bureau	Bill	Faries	National Security Team Leader	wfaries@bloomberg.net	1(202) 624-1800
Bloomberg News - Washington Bureau	Michael	Shepard	Deputy Managing Editor	mahopard7@bloomberg.net	1(202) 854-7347
Bloomberg News - Washington Bureau	Nick	Wadhams	Reporter	nwadhams@bloomberg.net	1(202) 775-7147
Business Insider	Siddhartha	Mahanta	Features Editor	smahanta@businessinsider.com	
BuzzFeed	Miriam	Elder	World Editor	miriam.elder@buzzfeed.com	(212) 431-7464
BuzzFeed	Emily	Tamkin		emily.tamkin@buzzfeed.com	
BuzzFeed - Washington Bureau	Hayes	Brown	Deputy World News Editor	hayes.brown@buzzfeed.com	1(212) 431-7464
CBC Television Network - New York Bureau	Melissa	Kent	United Nations Producer	melissa.kent@cbc.ca	1(212) 545-0510
CBS News Online	Camila	Schick	producer	camilaschick@cbnews.com	
CBS Television Network	Pamela	Falk	U.N. Resident Correspondent	pfalk@cbnews.com	1(917) 520-1785
CGTN America	John	Terrett	New York Correspondent	john.terrett@cgtnamerica.com	1(202) 639-4747
Chicago Tribune	Mitchell	May	Deputy National & Foreign News Editor	mrmay@chicagotribune.com	1(312) 222-3302
CNBC	Emma	Newburger		emma.newburger@cnbc.com	
CNET - New York Bureau	Dan	Patterson	Senior Producer	dan.patterson@cbsinteractive.com	1(646) 472-4000
CNN	Natalie	Gallon		Natalie.Gallon@turner.com	
CNN	AnneClaire	Stapleton	Senior International News Editor	anneclaire.stapleton@turner.com	(404) 827-1500
CNN - Washington Bureau	Jake	Tapper	Chief Washington Correspondent	jake.tapper@turner.com	1(202) 898-7911
CNN International	Richard	Roth	Senior International Correspondent	richard.roth@turner.com	1(212) 275-8064
CNN/Daily Beast	Kimberly	Dozier	Global Affairs Analyst	kimberlydozier@protonmail.com	
Corriere della Sera - New York Bureau	Giuseppe	Sarcina	Correspondent	gsarcina@corriere.it	1(212) 308-2000
Council on Foreign Relations	Zach	Laub		ZLaub@cfr.org	
CO Now	Rachel	Oswald	Foreign Policy Reporter	rachelaoswald@copollcall.com	1(202) 650-6455
Criton, Jean-Claude	Jean-Claude	Criton	Pigiste	jc@presscom.com	1(805) 895-8185
Deutsche Presse-Agentur (dpa) - New York Bureau	Helen	Corbett	Korrespondentin / Correspondent	corbett.helen@dpa.com	1(212) 355-0318
Dewex	Amy	Leiberman	New York Correspondent	amy.leiberman@deewex.com	1(202) 245-9222
Fareed Zakaria GPS - CNN	Dana	Sheme	Writer/Producer	dana.sheme@turner.com	1(404) 827-1500
Fast Company	Christopher	Zara	News Editor	czara@fastcompany.com	1(212) 389-5444
Feature Story News	Liling	Tan	United Nations Correspondent	liling@featurestory.com	1(202) 295-9012
Foreign Affairs	Justin	Vogt	Managing Editor	--	1(212) 434-9508
Foreign Policy	Gordon	Adams	Contributing Writer		
Foreign Policy	Robbie	Granner	Diplomacy/ National security Repo	robber.granner@foreignpolicy.com	1(202) 728-7300
Foreign Policy	Amy	Mackinnon		AMY.MACKINNON@FOREIGNPOLICY.COM	
Foreign Policy	Molly	O'Toole		molly.o'toole@foreignpolicy.com	
Foreign Policy	Kathryn	Salam	Deputy Editor	Kathryn.Salam@foreignpolicy.com	1(202) 728-7300
Foreign Policy	Colum	Lynch	Senior Diplomatic Reporter	columlynch@protonmail.com	1(212) 759-2997
Foreign Policy	James	Traub	Contributing Editor	tp@foreignpolicy.com	1(202) 728-7300
Foreign Policy Online	Ben	Soloway		Benjamin.Soloway@foreignpolicy.com	
FOX News Channel	George	Russell	Editor-at-Large	george.russell@foxnews.com	1(212) 301-3000
Heing, Bridy	Bridy	Heing	Freelance Writer	bridy.heing@gmail.com	
HuffPost	Albar	Ahmed		albar.ahmed@huffpost.com	
HuffPost	Nick	Robins-Early	World News Reporter	nick.robins-early@huffpost.com	
HuffPost	Amy	Russo		amy.russo@huffpost.com	
HuffPost	Jessica	Schulberg	Foreign Affairs Reporter	jessica.schulberg@huffingtonpost.com	
HuffPost - Washington Bureau	Albar	Ahmed	Foreign Affairs Reporter	albar.ahmed@huffpost.com	
Inner City Press	Matthew	Lee	Founder, Editor & Senior Reporter	matthew.lee@innercitypress.com	1(718) 716-3540
Inter Press Service - North America Bureau	Thailif	Deen	Director & Senior Consulting Editor	thailifdeen@aol.com	
Inter Press Service - North America Bureau	Tharanga	Yakupitiyage		tharanga.yakupitiyage@gmail.com	
Irish Examiner - New York Bureau	Gloria	Kins	United Nations Correspondent	kinsgroup@aol.com	1(212) 734-8844

Outlet	First	Last	Title	Email	Phone
Korea Times - New York Bureau	Yong Il	Shin	United Nations Correspondent	yishin@koreatimes.com	1(212) 865-8484
L' Orient Le Jour - New York Bureau	Sylviane	Zehli	United Nations Correspondent	syzehli@aol.com	1(212) 963-5236
Los Angeles Times	Molly	Hennessy-Fiske	Foreign Affairs Staff Writer	mollyhf@gmail.com	
Los Angeles Times	Mitchell	Landsberg	Deputy Editor, National & Foreign	mitchell.landsberg@latimes.com	1(213) 237-7001
Los Angeles Times - Washington Bureau	Tracy	Wilkinson	Reporter	tracy.wilkinson@latimes.com	1(213) 237-5000
Maghreb Arabe Press - United Nations Bureau	Boudhra	Benyoussef	United Nations Correspondent	b.boudhra2001@gmail.com	1(212) 963-4068
Mainichi Shimbun - New York Bureau	Kazuhiko	Kusano	Bureau Chief	kusano-k@mainichi.co.jp	(212) 765-1240
Morning Edition - NPR/National Public Radio	Steve	Inskip	Host	stnskip@npr.org	1(202) 813-2183
Mother Jones	Hannah	Levitova	Reporter	hlevitova@motherjones.com	1(202) 813-1147
New York Post	Tamar	Lapin		lapin@nypost.com	
Newport Daily Express	Pat	Oviss	United Nations Correspondent		1(802) 334-6568
Newsday	Zachary	Dowdy	Staff Writer	zachary.dowdy@newsday.com	1(631) 843-2294
Newsweek	Matthew	McAlester	Global Editor in Chief	m.mcalester@newsweek.com	
Notre Dame - New York Bureau	Maurizio	Guerrero	Bureau Chief	maurizio.guerrero@yahoo.com	1(917) 903-3666
NPR/National Public Radio	Francesca	Paris		paris@npr.org	
NPR/National Public Radio Online	Hannah	Bloch	Lead Digital Editor, International N	hbloch@npr.org	1(202) 513-2000
NPR/National Public Radio Online	Alex	Leff	International Digital Editor	aleff@npr.org	1(202) 513-2000
NPR/National Public Radio Online	Scott	Neuman	Reporter/Editor	sneuman@npr.org	1(202) 513-2000
Pacific Press Agency	Albin	Lohr-Jones	United Nations Photo-Correspondent		
PBS MATCH - BUREAU DE NEW YORK	Olivier	O'Mahony	Chief de Bureau	oomahony@lagardere-se.com	1(014) 134-7249
PBS Newshour - PBS	Layla	Quran	Foreign Affairs and Defense	lquran@newshour.org	(703) 998-2798
PBS Newshour - PBS	Daniel	Sagalyn	Deputy Senior Producer for Foreign	dsagalyn@newshour.org	1(703) 998-2877
POLITICO	Nehal	Toosi	Foreign Affairs Correspondent	ntoosi@politico.com	1(703) 647-7999
POLITICO	Bryan	Bender	National Security Correspondent	bender@politico.com	1(703) 647-7999
POLITICO	Lauren	Gardner	Reporter	lgardner@politico.com	1(703) 647-7999
Press Trust of India/PTI - New York Bureau	Yoshita	Singh	Chief Correspondent	yoshita.singh@yahoo.co.in	
PRI's The World - PRI/Public Radio International	Stephen	Snyder	Senior Radio Producer	amerell@qaz.com	1(617) 300-2729
Quartz	Amalisa	Merrell	Geopolitics Reporter	g.merrell@quartz.com	1(347) 681-3191
Rail - New York Bureau	Giovanna	Botteri	Bureau Chief	g.botteri@rai.it	1(212) 468-2586
Reuters	Rodrigo	Campos	Emerging Markets Correspondent	rodrigo.campos@thomsonreuters.com	1(646) 223-6344
Reuters	Sebastien	Malo	Climate Correspondent	sebastien.malo@tr.com	1(646) 223-7664
Reuters	Daniel	Wessner	Legal Correspondent	daniel.wessner@thomsonreuters.com	1(646) 223-4000
Reuters - Editors (US)	Warren	Strobel	Diplomatic Editor	warren.strobel@thomsonreuters.com	1(202) 310-5660
Reuters - Los Angeles Bureau	Mary	Milliken	Foreign Policy Editor	mary.milliken@thomsonreuters.com	1(213) 380-2014
Reuters - United Nations Bureau	Michelle	Nichols	United Nations Bureau Chief	michelle.nichols@thomsonreuters.com	1(212) 355-6053
Reuters - Washington Bureau	Idrees	Ali	Foreign Policy Correspondent	idrees.ali@thomsonreuters.com	1(202) 898-8300
Reuters - Washington Bureau	John	Walcott	National Security & Foreign Policy	john.walcott@thomsonreuters.com	1(202) 898-8300
Reuters - Washington Bureau	Jason	Szep	Editor in Chief, National Affairs	jason.szep@thomsonreuters.com	(202) 898-8300
SABC News - New York Bureau	Shervin	Bryce-Pease	UN Correspondent	s.brycepease@gmail.com	1(917) 703-4470
Sampathkumar, Mythili	Mythili	Sampathkumar	Freelance Journalist	mythilis1@gmail.com	
Sanket Shimbun - New York Bureau	Mayu	Uetsuka	Bureau Chief	mayu.uetsuka@csny.com	1(212) 702-0454
Security Council Report - New York Bureau	Joanna	Weschler	United Nations Correspondent	jsw78@columbia.edu	1(212) 759-5186
Slate	Fred	Kaplan	Columnist	war_stories@hotmail.com	1(646) 494-8630
Slate - Washington Bureau	Joshua	Keating	Staff Writer	joshua.keating@slate.com	1(646) 494-8630
Talk Media News - New York Bureau	Luke	Vargas	Chief Foreign Correspondent	luke@talkmediainews.com	1(617) 909-9169
TASS - United Nations Bureau	Oleg	Zelenin	Senior Correspondent	wahtitas@gmail.com	1(212) 686-6764
The Atlantic	Krishnadev	Calamur	Diplomacy Editor	kcalamur@theatlantic.com	
The Atlantic	Kathy	Glisan	Staff Writer	kathy@theatlantic.com	1(617) 450-2387
The Christian Science Monitor	Scott	Armstrong	Senior Editor	armstrong@csps.com	1(202) 266-6000
The Christian Science Monitor	Howard	LaFranchi	Diplomacy Correspondent	lafranchi@csps.com	1(617) 450-2387
The Christian Science Monitor	Mark	Sapperfield	Editor	sapperfield@csps.com	1(617) 450-2000
The Daily Beast	Charles	Davis	Journalist	charles.davis@thedailybeast.com	
The Guardian	Ed	Pilkington	Chief Reporter, Guardian US	ed.pilkington@theguardian.com	1(917) 900-4553
The Guardian - Washington Bureau	Julian	Borger	World Affairs Editor	julian.borger@theguardian.com	1(202) 223-2486
The Hill	Brandon	Conradis		bconradis@thehill.com	
The Himalachal Times - New York Bureau	Vijay	Pandhi	United Nations Correspondent	jaypandhi@aol.com	1(718) 850-6673
The Inquirer	Amanda	Weaver		amanda@inquirer.com	
The Intercept	Ryan	Devereaux		ryan.devereaux@theintercept.com	
The Miami Herald	Jim	Wys	Correspondent	jwys@miamiherald.com	(573) 124-6517 x
The Nation	Barbara	Crosette	Op-Ed Columnist	--	1(212) 209-5400
The New York Times	Roger	Cohen		roger.cohen@nytimes.com	
The New York Times	Carol	Glacono	Editorial Writer	glacono@nytimes.com	1(212) 556-7169

Outlet	First	Last	Title	Email	Phone
The New York Times	Rick	Gladstone	Foreign Desk Editor	rickg@nytimes.com	1(212) 555-8062
The New York Times	Frances	Robles		frances.robles@nytimes.com	
The New York Times	Michael	Schwartz	Investigative Reporter	schwartz@nytimes.com	
The New York Times	Ananda	Taub	Columnist	ananda.taub@nytimes.com	
The New York Times	Roger	Cohen	Op-Ed Columnist	roger.cohen@nytimes.com	
The New York Times	Adel	Hassan	Reporter	adel.hassan@nytimes.com	
The New York Times	Andrew	Jacobs	Reporter	jacobsa@nytimes.com	
The New York Times	Michael	Schwartz	Investigative Reporter	schwartz@nytimes.com	
The New York Times	Somini	Sengupta	Reporter	sengupta@nytimes.com	
The New York Times	Hiroko	Tabuchi	Reporter	tabuchi@nytimes.com	1(212) 556-2642
The New York Times - Washington Bureau	Lara	Jakes	Correspondent	lara.jakes@nytimes.com	1(202) 862-0300
The New Yorker	Carla	Blumenkrantz	Senior Editor	carla.blumenkrantz@newyorker.com	1(212) 286-2860
The New Yorker	Alexis	Okeowo	Staff Writer	aboutexodus@gmail.com	1(212) 286-2860
The Texas Tribune	Hannah	Wiley		--	
The Wall Street Journal	Hamnad	Jawdat	World Desk News Editor	hamnad.jawdat@wsj.com	1(212) 416-2094
The Wall Street Journal	Matt	Murray	Editor in Chief	matmurray@wsj.com	1(212) 416-4232
The Wall Street Journal	Peter	Saidel	Deputy World Editor	peter.saidel@wsj.com	(212) 416-2000
The Wall Street Journal	Farnaz	Fasshi	Senior Writer	farnaz.fasshi@wsj.com	(212) 416-2000
The Wall Street Journal - Washington Bureau	Gerald	Selb	Executive Washington Editor	gerald.selb@wsj.com	1(202) 862-9225
The Washington Post	Jackson	Diehl	Deputy Editorial Page Editor & Col	jackson.diehl@washpost.com	1(202) 334-7467
The Washington Post	Michael	Gerson	Columnist	michael.gerson@washpost.com	(202) 334-6000
The Washington Post	Douglas	Jehl	Foreign Editor	Douglas.Jehl@washpost.com	1(202) 334-6000
The Washington Post	Ruby	Mellen		ruby.mellen@washpost.com	
The Washington Post	Carol	Morello	Diplomatic Correspondent	carol.morello@washpost.com	1(202) 334-6042
The Washington Post	Siobhan	O'Grady	Staff Writer	siobhan.o'grady@washpost.com	1(202) 334-6000
The Washington Post	Claire	Parker	Reporter	claire.parker@washpost.com	
The Washington Post	Eva	Rodriguez	Deputy Foreign Editor	eva.rodriguez@washpost.com	1(202) 334-6000
The Washington Post	Ishaan	Tharoor	Foreign Affairs Reporter	ishaan.tharoor@washpost.com	1(202) 334-6000
The Washington Post	Adam	Taylor	Foreign Affairs Reporter	adam.taylor@washpost.com	1(202) 334-6000
The Washington Post	Karen	DeYoung	Associate Editor & Senior Natio	karen.deyoung@washpost.com	1(202) 334-7468
The Washington Post	Lally	Weymouth	Senior Associate Editor	lally.veymouth@washpost.com	1(202) 334-6000
The Washington Post	Adam	Kushner	Outlook Editor	Adam.kushner@washpost.com	1(202) 334-6000
TIME	Ian	Brenner	Foreign Affairs Columnist & Editor	brenner@eurasiagroup.net	1(212) 522-1212
TIME	Abigail	Abrams	Staff Writer	abigail.abrams@timemagazine.com	1(212) 522-1212
Tokyo Shimbun/Chunichi Shimbun - United Nation	Tomotoshi	Aoyagi	Bureau Chief	aoyagi.t@chunichi.co.jp	1(212) 969-1870
Tokyo Shimbun/Chunichi Shimbun - United Nation	David	Caprara	Reporter	david@tokyoshimbun.us	1(212) 969-1870
Tokyo Shimbun/Chunichi Shimbun - United Nation	Miki	Kato	United Nations Correspondent	kato.m2@chunichi.co.jp	1(212) 969-1870
Tribune - New York Bureau	Ian	Williams	Correspondent	usawirereport@ipc.org	1(212) 686-8884
Turkish Journal - New York Bureau	Selcuk	Acar	United Nations Correspondent	selcuk.acar@tas.com.tr	1(917) 365-6087
TV Japan	Widad	Franco	Producer	widad.franco@rhkny.com	1(212) 960-0535
UN Dispatch	Mark	Goldberg	Executive Editor	mark.goldberg@gmail.com	
UN Tribune	Denis	Fitzgerald	Editor	dfitzgerald@untribune.com	
USA Today	John	Bacon	Rewrite Chief	jbacon@usatoday.com	(703) 854-3656
USA Today	Sergio	Bustos	World Editor	SBustos@usatoday.com	
USA Today	Deirdre	Shesgreen	Congressional Reporter	dshesgreen@usatoday.com	1(703) 854-3400
USA Today	Nicole	Carroll	Editor in Chief	nicole@usatoday.com	1(703) 854-3400
VICE	Nicholas	Miriello	Senior International Editor	nick.miriello@vice.com	1(718) 598-3101
Voice of America Radio Network	Elizabeth	Arrott	Deputy Foreign Editor	earrott@voa.gov	1(202) 203-4000
Voice of America Radio Network	Kenneth	Rose		rose.kenneth.voa@gmail.com	
Voice of America Radio Network - New York Bureau	Margaret	Besheer	United Nations Correspondent	mbesheer@voanews.com	1(212) 826-4529
Vox	Zack	Beauchamp	Senior Reporter	zack@vox.com	(202) 591-1140
Vox	Jennifer	Williams	Deputy Foreign Editor & National	jennifer@vox.com	1(202) 591-1140
WorldTribune.com	John	Metzler	Contributing Editor	world@worldtribune.com	1(703) 764-2614
Yomiuri Shimbun - United Nations Bureau	Yuji	Yoshikata	United Nations Correspondent	yui02020@yomiuri.com	1(212) 752-2196
The New York Times	Peter	Baker	White House		
The Washington Post	David	Nakamura	White House		